



HAL
open science

Call it sleep as palimpsest

Gérard Cordesse

► **To cite this version:**

Gérard Cordesse. Call it sleep as palimpsest. Colette Stévanovitch; Henry Daniels. L'affect et le jugement : mélanges offerts à Michel Morel à l'occasion de son départ à la retraite, 1 (6), Association des médiévistes anglicistes de l'enseignement supérieur, pp.149-162, 2005, GRENDEL, 2-901198-39-2. hal-04674772

HAL Id: hal-04674772

<https://hal.science/hal-04674772v1>

Submitted on 21 Aug 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Gérard Cordesse
Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail

***Call It Sleep* as Palimpsest**

My long friendship with Michel Morel has brought us occasional opportunities to disagree with each other but we have been of one mind about the necessity to engage oneself body and soul when reading literary texts. In our formative years already emotional reaction and axiological judgment were felt by us to be of the essence, perhaps to counteract the two formalist influences of classical rhetoric and abstract structuralism, that occupied the intellectual stage.

Ideally the initial affective aesthetic reaction is the stable pediment on which more elaborate interpretation can be built yet I would like to examine a case in which the construction of this pediment is found to be problematic and subject to reconstruction.

Call It Sleep was first published in 1934 to some acclaim, being hailed as a representative of the New Deal “proletarian novel”, which was meant to combine nitty-gritty realism and social protest. Although the novel does describe the poor Jewish immigrants of the Lower East Side and thus conforms to the criterion of realism, its social commitment remains more implicit than explicit, as the Communist press deplored at the time. In spite of its initial success Henry Roth’s first novel was soon forgotten, all the more easily as Roth stopped writing when getting stuck into his next project, a true proletarian novel, and left the New York literary scene. It was miraculously revived more than a generation later thanks to Alfred Kazin and Leslie Fiedler, in a new perspective, no longer as a socially conscious novel but, in the words of Alfred Kazin, as “a classic of psychological fiction”, while Walter Allen detected in its psychology “a classical

Freudian pattern"; Leslie Fiedler went one step further in the spiritual direction when he applied to it C. M. Doughty's epigram "the Semites are like to a man sitting in a cloaca to the eyes, and whose brows touch heaven". The change of appreciation is an indication of the exceptional complexity of the novel.

Psychology and spirituality are indeed central in the portrait of David, the young protagonist of the novel: an intense Oedipal triangle underlies his spiritual yearnings and propels him towards sublimation. David's anguished struggle between father and mother, between fear and bliss, between dark cellar and sunlight, later becomes culturally colored by Judaism when he attends the Jewish religious school, the *heder* and discovers Isaiah's dazzling vision of God. Step by step the psychological tensions have led to religious sublimation. At the heart of the novel lies a strange contradiction between the poetic empathy felt for the anguished protagonist and the near-scientific psycho-analytical approach that should undermine the validity of David's illumination by explaining its psychological necessity. David, trapped in an unbearable situation finds an outlet in mystical visions.

Moreover orthodox Judaism does not play the central part we could expect given the Isaiah reference. In fact the representative of orthodoxy, Rabbi Pankover, is far from an inspiring figure: ill-kept, frustrated by his unruly pupils and hostile to American culture he feels David's quality without being able to guide him spiritually.

Unguided, David gropes his way forward thanks to makeshift devices: his spiritual inspiration comes from props like dazzling sunlight reflected on water, a line of telegraph poles, the purity of snow, burning coal, and short circuits on the tramcar rail. Strikingly in the crucial final scene: David reaches illumination by the latter modern and material device: electricity. Doesn't this choice by Roth discredit traditional channels of sublimation like established religion? Does this matter-of-fact channel weaken the validity of David's illumination? Does it simply suggest a childish misapprehension of modern lay technology?

Far from being a debunking the great short circuit scene is in fact the stylistic apotheosis of the novel. One feels the admiration of

Call It Sleep as Palimpsest

Roth for the experiments of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot in the fractured monologues and in the mosaic construction of the chapter. Roth abandons the prevalent internal focalization on David in favor of an omniscient narration (zero focalization) which extends illumination and redemption to the debased immigrant crowd:

Before the flaring light, the weird white-lipped, staring faces of the milling throng wheeled from chalk to soot and soot to chalk again—like masks of flame that charred and were rekindled. (422)¹

This lyrical vision transmutes the destitution and corruption reminiscent of *The Waste Land* thanks to a communion of solidarity. So the miracle has occurred, transcendence is not to be dismissed as an illusion, it is effective both individually for David, and collectively for mankind. By choosing the medium of electricity rather than prayer Roth seems to propound a modern non-denominational version of spirituality that would coexist with, and issue from, scientific civilization. It is fitting to mention that at the time of the writing, Roth, an atheist since the age of 14, had been converted to communism, the “secular religion” according to Marcel Gauchet’s formula. The communion scene is indeed redolent of the utopian fervor of the early thirties that prevailed not only in America but in British and French literary movements (Auden, Aragon, Jules Romains...). Sociologically the attraction of Jewish immigrants towards leftist movements has often been noticed, and explained by a transference of Jewish messianism to political apocalypse (the original meaning of “apocalypse” being “revelation”).

Another rich field for sublimation had opened for Roth as is apparent in his enthusiasm for avant-garde experimentation (the High Modernists), that he records in an autobiographical piece, *Kaddish*:² “the twenties were vivid with innovations, with brilliant advances in all fields of art” (187). In a first fragment of his future tetralogy (*Mercy of a Rude Stream*, 1994-98) he recalls his early dedication to literature eloquently:

¹ All references to *Call It Sleep* are to the 1964 Avon edition.

² *Shifting Landscape*, New-York : Jewish Publication Society, 1987.

He conjured up a world elsewhere—the kid with the library books under his arm crossing Mount Morris Park at dusk, the kid who had learned the knack of trying to match words that would vie with the pale star in the limpid sky above the rocky monadock to the right, with its unused fire-warning bell tower on top, words as limpid and holy as the scene... He won another haven, a superior one, he thought, a permanent and inviolable one, in the world of letters, in the world of art³.

The religious vocabulary signals the conversion and sublimation.

I first read the novel in terms of this double Freudian sublimation, both to the cult of art and to a lay version of spirituality imbued with political messianism. In the background there remained a vague nostalgic affiliation to Judaism, felt to be archaic and outmoded but emotionally powerful.

At this point there occurred in my reading a disturbing and unexpected discovery. I was led out of curiosity to investigate the history of Jewish mysticism (mainly through Gershom Scholem) of which I was largely ignorant, being of an agnostic turn of mind if not of atheistic persuasion. I hoped to elucidate obscurities (cf. order from noise theory) mainly located in puzzling images and incidents. I found echoes of the Jewish esoteric tradition in the text without focusing on hard evidence of its presence. Noticing the age-old interest of the Cabala for letters and numbers (in the *Gematria* for instance) I was attracted to the paratext, namely the division into chapters and books: lo and behold, to my unbelieving eyes a pattern emerged that shook the confidence I had always placed in Umberto Eco's maxim "il faut se méfier de la convoitise du sens caché".

Call It Sleep is divided into 4 books; Book I is made of 16 chapters, Books II and III of 9 chapters each, and Book IV of 22 chapters. The 4 Books correspond to the Tetragrammaton, the 4 letters in the sacred name of God. According to Cabalistic cosmology the world creation was shaped by the first ten numbers, the *sefirot*, the intelligible lights, which are aspects of the deity, and by the 22 letters

³ Itinerant Ithacan, *Ibid*, 209.

Call It Sleep *as Palimpsest*

of the Hebrew alphabet. In other words the intelligible world is structured by mathematics and language or writing. There are 9 *sefirot*, which together form the tenth one. Added, the 22 letters plus the ten *sefirot* compose the 32 Paths of Wisdom that lead to God. Now the 16 chapters of Book I entitled The Cellar, which launch David's spiritual quest are half the total of the 32 Paths of Wisdom, i.e. half-way. Books II and III reiterate the 9 *sefirot* (each book as a whole making up the tenth), and the 22 chapters of Book IV complete the itinerary. These numbers are not indifferent items in the Cabala that I could conveniently select out of a long series; the tetragrammaton, the *sefirot* and the alphabet are the basic numbers of cabalistic cosmology and dismissing them as mere coincidence is not easy. If we accept that they are a cabalist signature, we have to admit that Roth encoded at least the structure of his novel in this secret way. Even if the forthcoming rereading of the novel did not corroborate the significance of the Cabala (suspense!), we would have to account for this strange secret code.

Before turning to the re-examination of the text let us consider the historical possibility of finding the Cabala in a twentieth century American novel. Roth's family came from Galitzia, on the eastern fringe of the Austrian empire, with a strong Yiddish-speaking population, and a tradition of hasidic messianism in which the memory of the self-proclaimed Messiah Sabbatai Zevi had been kept alive. Sabbatianism, frankism and hasidism are pregnant with cabalistic elements. In his recent autobiographical texts Roth declares that his grandfather was so observant that his orthodoxy was *medieval*. It is not far fetched to admit that Roth, a pious youth who was singled out by his rabbi as a future great rabbi, came into contact with elements of the Cabala that were kept alive in hasidism.

Internal evidence

Equipped with this signature of the novel, several features of the novel take on new significance.

The enigmatic telegraph pole scene makes sense when one notes that the boy, near nervous collapse, runs away and miraculously

recovers composure and peace of mind by following and counting telegraph poles.

They dropped behind him. Three....Four....Five....Six....drew near, floated by in silence like tall masts. Seven....Eight....Nine....Ten....he stopped counting them. And with them, dwindling in the past, all he feared, all he loathed and fled from. (93)

The mystical quality of his emotion is later confirmed when, in *heder*, he learns of Isaiah's vision of God and associates it with his own experience:

Where did he go to see Him? God? Didn't say. Wonder if the rabbi knows? Wish I could ask. Page sixty-eight. Way, way, way, maybe. Where? Gee! Some place, me too... When I—in the street faraway... Hello, Mr. Highwood, good bye Mr. Highwood. (230)

The cabalistic touch in this spiritual experience is that the boy reaches bliss simply by counting from one to ten.

His crucial illumination also occurs on *Tenth* Street, a number insistently repeated, prayer-like, in the short circuit scene.

The Biblical text, that guides him in his quest: “Kaddosh, Kaddosh, Kaddosh”, Holy, Holy, Holy (Isaiah VI, 3) is a text privileged by the Merkaba, the early form of the Cabala, in the spiritual exercises leading to ecstatic trance.

When dazzled by the sun reflected on the oily East River (247-48) David rediscovers an ancient technique of the Cabala recommended by Yehuda the Hassid to his disciple Eleazar of Worms: “Fasten your attention onto this brilliance (the sun on oily water), for it is similar to that of the Khasmah”.

Beside these incidental features it is useful to take a wider view and consider now the part played by evil in the cabalistic spiritual experience.

Evil is a pervasive presence in *Call It Sleep*: its emblem is darkness. The association between darkness, sin, sex, death and the devil is constant: “What's real dark? Real dark. Gee! That time—Annie-closet-Cellar-Luter-Sh! Don't! Gee! Sin it was” (240), and “Touch a crack, touch a cella', touch a cella', touch a devil. He, black buggerunner!” (371) The originality in *Call It Sleep* is that light and

Call It Sleep as Palimpsest

darkness are not alien to one another; they are not two separate worlds. In fact the spiritual light appears in the very cellar, in darkness, in sin, at the acme of terror. It does not simply annihilate darkness, it emanates from it, during the trance on the river for instance: “Sin melted into light” (248) as well as after the first short circuit scene: “In the dark, in the river was there. Came out if He wanted, was there” (254), as well as during the reading of the Kaddosh text:

Twice through the yard, as though a lantern had been swung back and forth above the roof-tops, violet light rocked the opposite walls and darkness for a moment and a clap of thunder and a rumbling like a barrel rolling down cellar stairs. (234)

Even on the roof-top the light is not alone: “Even up here dark follows, but only a little bit” (296). In this scene the flock of pigeons associates light and darkness and an echo of the “rippling water in the sun” reminiscent of the cabalistic trance. When David reads the Kaddosh for the second time the ambivalent pigeon imagery returns:

A cadence like a flock of pigeons, vast, heaven-filling, swept and wheeled, glittered, darkened, kindled again, like wind over prairies. (366)

Even in unobtrusive descriptions the paradoxical association of corruption and light is present:

And now on the top-step of the stoop, he paused awhile and watched the Hungarian janitor polish one of the brass bannisters in front of the house. It had a corrupt odor, brass, as of something rotting away, and yet where the sun struck the burnished metal, it splintered into brilliant yellow light. Decay. Radiance. Funny. (242)

“Coal” is the title of Book III, the apt symbol of the continuity between darkness and light. Coal is dark and is found in the Cellar (the title of Book I) but when incandescent it emits light and purifies Isaiah’s lips from uncleanness, allowing him to speak to God. It bridges the gap between the two realms. In the final scene it is present in David’s vision:

But out of the darkness, zone ember flowered, one ember in a mirror, swimming without motion in the motion of its light. Coal! In a cellar is Coal! And it was brighter than the pith of lightning and milder than pearl, and made the darkness dark because the dark had culled its radiance for that jewel. (430)

According to the Lurian Cabala evil is an accident, symbolized by the “Breaking of the Vessels”: in this breaking of harmony sparks of divine light were scattered among darkness. The restoration (*Tikkun*) i.e. the gathering of the sparks, must be effected by the *saddik*, elect, or messiah, who, far from shunning darkness must descend into it, into sin in order to retrieve the lost sparks. Claudio Magris after Gershom Scholem gives an eloquent summary of this transgressive tradition:

Dans certaines formes extrêmes du messianisme juif, on exhortait à accélérer le triomphe du mal – en profanant la Loi et en pratiquant toutes sortes de transgressions – pour hâter l’avènement du Messie, lequel arrive, comme le nouveau-né, quand les « douleurs » de l’histoire sont à leur paroxysme, le mal à son apogée, de même que, plus tôt arrive minuit, le comble des ténèbres, et plus tôt arrivera la lumière de l’aube.⁴

David’s feeling of “strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence” now makes sense when, in the very last paragraph of the novel he “can strike a spark into the cloudy tinder of the dark” (441) and redeem all the horrors of his world. Similar allusions to the Lurian cosmology abound, for instance when he is about to “challenge the dark”: “lighted windows in factories, mills were caught like sparks in blocks of soot” (411). The frequent use of the word “chaos” is also evocative of “the Breaking of the Vessels”. David’s personal history parallels the cosmological one, starting as it does with beatitude with his mother, shattered by wrenching away then restored. The image of fragmentation accompanies his traumatic discovery of sex and evil:

But she didn’t know as he knew how the whole world could break into a thousand little pieces, all buzzing, all whining, and no one hearing them, and no one seeing them except himself. (55)

The same image illustrates the beating by his father:

The open hand struck him full against the cheek and temple, splintering the brain into fragments of light. Spheres, mercuric, splattered, condensed and roared. (83)

The personal story and the cosmological one coincide; Gershom Scholem defined the Cabala as “a mystical psychology”: David’s

⁴ Claudio Magris, *Utopie et Désenchantement*, Paris : Gallimard, 2001.

Call It Sleep as Palimpsest

mission is to restore the unity of his world and of ours. To do so he must hunt for the sparks of light lost within darkness.

The association of his father with darkness is constantly conveyed by images and vocabulary; he is transformed into the cosmological villain of hasidism (perhaps an echo of the gnostic tradition), “the angel of death”. In his own words he seems aware of his double nature: “She’s jesting with the angel of death” (200) and “Don’t jump up as if you saw the gloomy angel” (265). When “possessed” Albert radiates “black fire” and behaves like the terrifying creature that haunts the mother:

How shall I put it in words – the fullest cup of death! It seemed to me that heaven and air were filled with laughter, but strange, black laughter. God forgive me! And words I heard, gnashing in it like teeth. (200)

The recitation of the *chad godyaw* (one kid, one only kid) is an important step in his struggle against his father since in the hierarchy of the prayer God tops “the angel of death” (233).

David himself, when overwhelmed by sin and terror may be possessed by the gloomy angel:

A strange chaotic sensation was taking hold of him... a tumultuous giddy freedom, a cruel caprice that made him want to caper, to skip, to claw at his hands, to pinch himself until he screamed. A secret wanton laughter kept arising to his lips, but never issued, gurgled in his throat instead with a gurgle of pain [...] I’m Somebody else-else-else-ELSE [...] Him-Me! (370)

He then feels the world change around him:

Something alien and malignant had fused with all the familiar sounds and sights of the world. The sunlight that had been so dazzling before was mysteriously dulled now as though filtered by an invisible film... The stable lineaments of the mask of the world had overlapped, shifted configuration as secretly and minutely as clock-hands, as sudden as the wink of an eye. It was strange. It had happened before... He was haunted again. (274)

To the former psychological reading we can now superimpose a theological one. The world has been disfigured by the breaking of the vessels, it is necessary to look “behind the mask”, behind “the blank, enormous mirrors of the final apolyptic vision. The image of the

mirror (illusion) evokes the *ahra sitra*, the sinister world of the left side, of the demon. A cognate image is that of “the veil of earth” that David will finally split (420). But this will only happen when he has mastered the light, whereas he is twice compared to the hasidic figure of the Golem, a creature not yet animated by the divine spirit.

Repeatedly David feels he has to challenge the forces of darkness at the risk of annihilation:

Then darkness, swirling and savage caught him up like a wind of stone, pitched him spinning among palpable drum-beats, engulfed him in a brawling welter of ruined shapes – that parted – and he plunged down a wailing fathomless shaft. A streak of flame – and screaming nothingness. (354)

This first defeat will be redeemed by victory over darkness, a pattern of duplication that organizes several scenes in the book: first failure then success. In his heroic endeavor David feels entrusted with an irresistible mission that far exceeds his own person and time: “an act ordained, foreseen, inevitable as this very moment, a channel of expertness, imbued for ages, familiar as breath” (399). In the very last pages this certitude is reiterated while it evades him:

He couldn’t tell now why he had gone, except that something had forced him, something that was clear then and inevitable, but that every passing minute made more inarticulate. (437)

The theme of apostasy plays a part in the novel: David denies he is a Jew and acquires a rosary at great personal cost. This may be an echo of the latest outburst of Jewish messianism: sabbatianism. Sabbatai Zevi, the would-be Messiah, after reviving some teachings of the Cabala, concerning the necessity for the savior to go down into sin, committed apostasy by embracing Islam. Similarly David “goes down into darkness” and reaches nothingness. The great Tenth Street scene teems with cabalistic imagery and concepts. When David first regains consciousness he is still in the grip of darkness, then

out of the darkness, one ember flowered [...] One ember fanned... dulling...uncertain [...] like the red pupil of the eye of darkness, the ember dilated, spun like a spinwheel, expanding, expanding... (424)

Thanks to his sacrifice the triumph of light becomes assured in the transfiguration of his own plight:

Call It Sleep as Palimpsest

Nothingness beatified reached out its hands. Not cold the ember was. Not scorching. But as if all eternity's caress were fused and granted in one instant. Silence [...] struck that terrible voice upon the height, stilled the whirling hammer. Horror and the night fell away. Exalted, he lifted his head and screamed to him among the wires – 'Whistle, mister! Whistle!' (431)

The chapter may well end as it does on "Gott sei dank".

David does not reach revelation and peace only for himself. He stands at the center of concentric circles: like the messiah whose function is to redeem the whole world, the boy can bring peace to himself, to his family, then to the Yiddish community, the Jewish people and to humanity. The motley crowd on Tenth Street is first presented as degraded and corrupt but they converge on him and rescue him. Blasphemous O'Toole, the Gentile, always bragging about sex, money and power, is singled out to save David by risking electrocution. The phrase "babel of tongues" makes the people representative of all mankind: "Humanity. On feet, on crutches, in carts and cars" (407).

The vision of the multitude that invades David's so-called *sleep* in the last paragraph of the novel re-emphasizes that the redemption extends to all mankind. An oecumenical value is given to the final visions thanks to the inclusion of Christian elements: Jesus, the last cross, the Holy Mother of God, the man crucified among the wires, as if orthodox intransigence was irrelevant after apocalypse.

When Roth wrote *Call It Sleep* the Jewish immigrants were hesitating in their confrontation with America between strict orthodoxy, which amounted to rejection, and various forms of assimilation to American culture. In the book these solutions are presented and dismissed: Rabbi Pankover's fossilized adherence to discipline and tradition, Aunt Bertha's greedy dream of material success and the red cock fanatic orator who secularizes Jewish messianism in radical politics.

Did Roth refuse the dilemma of separation versus assimilation? Did he sketch an original and ambitious solution? Instead of a rejection of Judaism did he envision a renewal of its mystical

tradition? Instead of compromising Judaism with American ideology, the dream was perhaps to revitalize America with Jewish messianism. The secularized American Dream of universal happiness would be coupled with the religious promise of the coming of the second kingdom.

This would be an unexpected move that ran counter to the historical trend of acculturation. Roth was no doubt urged by his nostalgic love for the Yiddish East Side community that his family left when he was ten. He asserts that if the family had stayed in the snug orthodox Yiddish world of the East Side (he calls it a mini-state) instead of moving to the tense melting pot of Harlem (“rowdy, heterogenous Harlem”) “it’s very likely I could have become a rabbi”.¹ The uprooting had a shattering impact on the boy: “That which informed him, connective tissue of his people, inculcated by *heder*, countenanced by the street, sanctioned by God, all that dissolved when his parents moved from the East Side to Mick Harlem. The struts went and the staves. It would have to follow that the personality became amorphous, ambiguous, at once mystical and soiled, at once unbridled, inquisitive, shrinking...”² Yet in a 1964 letter he stressed the continuity behind the surface estrangement:

I denigrated the loss of the ancestral ones, their vast importance, something I had originally stressed. Fact is they were the important ones, however lightly I seemed to part with them. They transmuted themselves into a kind of pervasive mysticism that infused the youth... There was never a moment when I strayed from the mighty Hebrew conviction that this suffering meant something, must have a meaning.³

It is not surprising that what Roth defined as “a kind of pervasive mysticism” should have led him to make use of the ingredients of the Jewish mystical tradition, first of all the Cabala and its modern avatars: sabbatianism, frankism and hasidism. Beside shaping Roth’s general inspiration the Cabala fitted perfectly the High

¹ “Vale Atque Ave”, *Shifting Landscape*, 230.

² “No Longer at Home”, *Ibid*, 170.

³ *Ibid*, 70.

Call It Sleep as *Palimpsest*

Modernist aesthetics of the young novelist: myth, indirectness, symbolism, fascination for form echoed the age-old learned deciphering of, and tinkering with, the sacred texts. The Cabala relied on inventive hermeneutics to pierce the coded divine language. Roth's technique finds its roots in this attitude: adopting the equivalent of "constraints" in the Oulipian sense, he creates a coded language that calls forth a decoding reader. In Book I Roth may even "denude the process" and sketch his *ars poetica*. The mother has just told a strange story and David is incapable of seeing the point clearly:

But David felt cheated, even resentful. 'You – You haven't told me anything!' he protested. 'You haven't even told me what happened.'

Is this sufficient to answer the difficult question of why Roth did not indicate explicitly the nature of his coding? I for one would be tempted to say so. A more historical approach could suggest that the distance was too great between the secular aesthetes that Roth frequented and admired at the time in Greenwich Village and this archaic body of reference that he labelled "medieval" when referring to his grandfather. Maybe Roth had a failure of nerve, fearing that direct reference to the Cabala would brand him as an eccentric Jewish sectarian and thus cut him off from the American scene and the American readers. A final possibility is that this is a secret homage to the tradition that nurtured him, that he had intellectually abandoned and that the fire of creative experience revived in him. Was this emotional depth necessary to literary inspiration? Undoubtedly when he did try to write a true secular proletarian novel after *Call It Sleep* he was struck dumb.

To return to our initial question, the belated discovery of a cabalistic pattern that was meant to remain hidden (after all it would have been easy for Roth to give open indications either in the text or in his interviews, which he never did) does pose a problem of judgment. Aesthetically Roth's strategy of secret coding has proved to be successful since after dropping out of sight the novel became a best-seller and even a classic thirty years later. Does cracking the code as I claim to have done improve its aesthetic appreciation or does it decrease it? It is difficult for me to be assertive generally speaking,

given the narcissistic benefit I no doubt derived from this detective success, but I can vouch that my vision of the novel has been enriched by it. The cultural and aesthetic posture of Roth has become for me more ambiguous, more tortured, more complex and more original. My admiration for the novel far from being decreased by the new perspective has been enhanced by the revelation of the submerged palimpsest. That is to my mind a criterion of a better reception.